Perspective on Low Level Lead Toxicity

Lead in large amounts is toxic to man, and it is ubiquitous in the environment. Lead is present in small amounts in all living things without apparent harmful effects. Problems of concern to environmental health scientists are (1) the actual level of lead in people, particularly young children, in which adverse health effects occur, (2) recognition of this level of lead, and (3) identification of the sources of lead exposure.

This issue of *Environmental Health Perspectives* contains papers presented at a conference in Raleigh, N. C., October 1–2, 1973, jointly sponsored by the Office of Research and Development of the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. The title of the conference was "Low Level Lead Toxicity," and the purpose of the conference was to explore the significance of small increases in blood lead levels in children and the possible sources of the lead. The conference was organized into four sessions concerned with specific aspects of the problem. The first session reviewed the prevalence of increased blood lead levels (>40 μg/100 ml) in young children and the clinical evidence for possible central nervous system effects of small increases in blood lead levels. The second debated the environmental sources, and the routes of transport and absorption of lead responsible for the increases in blood lead levels. The last two sessions presented experimental studies regarding the partitioning and metabolism of lead, factors affecting susceptibility to lead toxicity, and, in particular, central nervous system effects.

As can be seen from the titles and content of the papers presented, a number of scientific disciplines and backgrounds were represented. The conference appeared to be helpful in defining the direction and types of studies required for further understanding of this problem.

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